

The Luna and her Quadruplet Pups by Jane Above Story

Chapter 176

Jane

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Ethan must not mean what I think – he must be suggesting some other solution and I simply don't understand.

There's no way he' d offer to let me sleep with him, and while I'd like to say that I would never contemplate cuddling up to someone who's been so cruel to me, the truth is that my wolf has no such pride. She wants me to climb right into Ethans strong arms and never leave again.

I'm saying that I'll stay with you if you need me to at a distance, of course." He supplies simply.

At a distance. i repeat in my head. Of course. It would be crazy to think he'd ever want to sleep beside me again, that he would willingly touch me. I should have learned my lesson earlier when I offered to become his slave again. What a proud moment that was. "That won't do any good."I finally reply, my tone rough and distant.

Why not?" Ethan inquires, clearly displeased with being refused. I clench my eyes shut, wishing I was big or strong enough to shake my former mate – his mood swings are every bit as wild and volatile as my own – and I'm pregnant! I don't know how to cope with this strange new Ethan, it's like the battle with Aimon unhinged him somehow. I don't recognize the man in front of me, and the only flashes of the old Ethan I can find are when he's with our pups.

"Because my nightmares are about you.' I answer hoarsely, sharing a truth I fully intended to keep buried. "So you being there would only make them worse.

Ethan growls, and I fight the instinct to flinch.

Then I'll give you a sleeping pill." He grumbles.

Either way, you need to rest."

Fine." I mutter glumly. "Whatever you say, Ethan.

That's what you meant by being civil, isn't it? That I just follow your orders and obey your every whim?"

"That's part of it." He confirms, turning his mind to our earlier conversation. Parker was hurt before we finished discussing his proposal – that we pretend to get along in front of the pups. "Does that mean you'll agree to my terms?"

I don't think I have any choice." I admit, not bothering to mask my misery. "I haven't had a say in any of this, so why should I now?"

"Good." Ethan nods, as if he didn't hear the second part of my reply. "This is my last Christmas with the pups, I want to make sure they remember it fondly."

I j3rk my head up. I know Ethan said he wouldn't change his mind about rejecting us, but part of me thought he would make an exception for the pups every once in a while, like the holidays. "Please don't say that." I beg, Please don't shut them out of your life for good."

I'm not going to have this argument again." Ethan declares, pulling me away from the pups door until we're out of hearing range. "We can't keep going around in circles like this – we have to move forward with our lives."

You love them." It sounds like an accusation, as if I'm indicting him for some terrible crime. Why is it so hard for him to admit? He's never shied away from showing affection before and it's especially galling after the lecture he gave the pups earlier. "I know you do! I can see it in your eyes every time you look at them. This doesn't have to be their last Christmas with you... can't you just keep an open mind? You don't know how you'll feel in a few years, it's too soon to be burning bridges this way.

I know that the pups need you more than they need me. Ethan asserts, pulling me away from "And I won't have you in my life, so that's that."

"Ethan, they need both of us." I argue. That's why we're here, because I tried to go it alone and it didn't work!"

"No, you saw Parker today. When he was hurt he wanted you, because at the end of the day, your bond with them is stronger than mine will ever be." He surveys me closely. "When you' re back on your feet you'll see I'm right. "

This is ridiculous, I don't know how he thinks I'll ever be able to get back on my feet without him.

Losing him is the reason I've fallen so low in the first place. "And just how are you planning on fixing me, Ethan?" I snipe, "forcing me to sleep and telling the pups I love them won't undo the damage you've inflicted, especially if you're planning on disappearing again."

You just worry about taking care of yourself.

Ethan orders. I'll handle the rest."

And what about the pack? Are you going to deprive it of its future leader? Parker is your heir and Ryder will be a strong Alpha one day." I reminds him.

They can't learn how to run a pack from me."

"Leading is about instinct." He says simply. "My father wasn't exactly an ideal role model and I figured it out. They'll be fine.

I'm not sure how it's possible for anything to surprise me anymore. I've come to expect nothing but harshness and neglect from Ethan, but this is too much. For a man who is obsessed with duty and responsibility, Ethan is being incredibly irresponsible. It simply doesn't compute. The more time I spend with him the more I think I must be missing something. His behavior is too erratic, too out of character and unpredictable. Yet I can't think of any reason why he might be doing this – what motive could he possibly have to abandon us, other than simple malice?

"What are you planning?" I ask at last, "how do you intend on making things better – enough that the pups won't run right back to you when I take them home again?"

Ethan frowns. I'm going to phase myself out. I was reckless to cut ties so immediately. This time well do it right, and that starts with giving them a happy holiday with their family. In the new year they I start school, they'll get into a routine and eventually when I start calling less and less, they'll stop expecting to hear from me. When they grow up they'll realize you were the better parent for being there. You just have to get through it in the meantime.

He makes it sound so simple, as if it's a matter of logic and strategy rather than emotion. "Children don't forget that easily." I inform him. And I still don't understand why you're so determined to reject them too."

"It's not for you to understand." He replies. Just accept it, move on and find someone new – someone who can be a better role model to them than I am."

A bitter laugh spills from my tongue. Well there's no denying that they need a stronger father figure."

I snipe honestly. "I don't want the boys to turn out like you, but you're crazy if you think I could trust another alpha enough to get involved with him.

You've done a very thorough job ensuring that will never happen."

"Now who's got a closed mind?" Ethan counters.

You don't know what the future holds, and you're still young. You might have a fated mate out there yourself"

His words are positively jarring. I can't fathom Ethan supporting the idea of me being with another man, even if he doesn't want me himself. He's always been so possessive, fiercely protective, and now he's not only suggesting I find a new lover, but that another man might stand in for him with our pups.

Red flags whirl through my mind, warnings and instincts insisting that something is wrong here.

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